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INTRODUCTION

Problem

An analysis and comparison of the thought of prominent liberals in the contemporary American pulpit.

Men Chosen

The choice of Niebuhr, Fosdick, Holmes, Dietrich and Tittle was not inevitable. Indeed it may be considered somewhat arbitrary. The first three are not only prominent but they do represent distinct theological positions. Choosing them, therefore, is logical and appropriate. Tittle is minister of a Methodist Church in a suburb of Chicago, which is also a college center. Dietrich is unique for his break with the theological and philosophical traditions of organized religion and also preaches in the northwest. More men would have made the study more authoritative but time was a factor in limiting the extent of the paper.

Material

The material has been gathered mainly from sermons except that of Niebuhr which comes principally from his Notebook and articles in the current periodicals. The material is divided into four groupings: theology, worship, personal morality, and social philosophy. One part of the paper is devoted to each of these subjects and in each part all the men are treated.

2.

Summary

A brief interpretation and summary is appended with schematizations suggested by the body of the paper.

CHAPTER I

THEOLOGY

Of all the contrasts presented in this study, none is greater than that found in the theology of the preachers. It is a great distance, indeed, from Dietrich on the left, with his human-centered and exclusively scientific universe, to Niebuhr on the right, with his absolutistic metaphysic and his dash of madness. In between we find Fosdick and Tittle with their pragmatic bias in favor of the substance of traditional theology, and Holmes, who is trying to maintain a philosophical position which will give him the values of both right and left wings and the drawbacks of neither.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr's message is characterized by a belligerent anti-intellectualism. His Notebook treats the mental life as irrelevant in ultimate questions.¹ In a provoking article in the Atlantic Monthly² he illustrates this position vigorously:

....All this would be very unreasonable except for the fact that reason depends upon this unreason. Reason may direct energy, but it cannot create it. The energy which is life itself is not reasonable.

In another connection, speaking before an American

¹P. 68 for instance.

²Reinhold Niebuhr, "Unhappy Intellectuals," Atlantic Monthly, 143 (June, 1929), 794.

college group on religion and modern culture, he asserts as the "considered opinion of many of us who have agonized over the religious problem" that the treasures of religion must not be surrendered because they lie outside the area of scientific demonstration:

....the way of truth is almost certainly not the way of excluding every value and insight of religion which cannot be¹ captured in, or validated by, the scientific method.

He admits that analysis may lead to understanding and that appreciation may follow perfect understanding. But this is not by any means a complete picture of what happens.

....appreciation can never be purely analytical. Love is always, in a sense, mystical and intuitive, which means that it proceeds from a sense of the whole. Whenever we fragmentize life we debase it.²

It does not surprise us after this to hear him speak of men of "unspoiled moral wisdom."³ And when he makes the lure of the Absolute the dynamic of religion, it is carrying the tendency but one step farther. "The function of religion is to preserve life's highest rationality, the urge toward the ideal."⁴

It is very difficult to interpret Niebuhr's position. When it becomes confused he glories in the confusion. When it appears foolish, he imitates St. Paul and says God's fool-

¹Niebuhr, Education Adequate for Our Times, p. 18. New York: Association Press, 1931.

²Niebuhr, Atlantic Monthly, 143:793.

³Niebuhr, Christian Century, June 18, 1930, p. 779.

⁴Niebuhr, Atlantic Monthly, 143:794.

ishness is wiser than your wisdom. He is, in his theology, intellectually conscienceless, mad with desire for that water which, if a man drink, he shall thirst no more.

He talks about the "enervation of complete rationality."

The ideals of religion need to be progressively rationalized, but the vigor with which they are pursued is easily lost in this process of refinement. Completely rational ideals are either completely separated from the world of reality or completely identified with it. In either case moral vigor is lost. If they are completely separated from the world of reality, they become illusions incapable of prompting moral effort; if they are completely identified with the world of reality, they lose their ideal character and give the real world an undeserved aura of ideality. A religion which expresses the urge toward the ideal in moral emotion and defines the ideal through poetic symbol escapes the enervation (sic) of complete rationality.¹

Just as he deprecates rationality so does he delight in coupling religion with madness.

....religion adds a touch of madness, precisely that touch of madness which, when combined with common sense, produces a compound of wisdom. Without the touch of madness all ethical life governed by reason sinks deeply into common sense and therefore it degenerates more and more into an enlightened self-interest, a prudent selfishness.²

Prudence, he defines as the qualification to man's struggle for power from an immediate point of view and holds that alone it will not build the ideal community. Man's lust for empire over his fellows and over the world must be curbed "religiously, irrationally":

Whenever people sacrifice an immediate joy for an ultimate good it may be rational and reasonable, but not from an immediate consideration. That is why man

¹Niebuhr, Atlantic Monthly, 143:794.

²Niebuhr, Education Adequate for Our Times, p. 55.

has crucified his saviors. There are some people imaginative enough to be true to high claims; but on the whole loyalty to an ultimate value as against loyalty to an immediate interest is an ultra-rational achievement.¹

The implications of this last sentence are fairly clear. Most men, to be wise, to be religious, need to be a bit mad. But there are some, Niebuhr reluctantly admits, who are "imaginative enough" to follow reason and still achieve the highest good. This is significant from the point of view of theory or theology, but from the standpoint of the practical ethical leader or statesman it can be neglected; "on the whole loyalty to an ultimate value as against loyalty to an immediate interest is an ultra-rational achievement."

A clue to Niebuhr's flagrant dualism may be found in the contrast between his realism when considering social maladjustment and his acceptance of an orthodox theological system. He is thoroughly informed in the field of modern industrial society and is at the same time utterly committed to evangelical Christianity. He is not unaware of this dualism. He knows that history laughs at a Christian statement of the universe; he knows that life is brutal, and that men are, more often than not, a petty breed. These things he holds to be true and deserving of consideration, but not too much.

It is the genius of morally vital religion that it is not too consistent in regard to this problem. It has an ideal for which the forces of nature and history offer only the slightest opportunity of triumph,

¹Niebuhr, "Religious Imagination and the Scientific Method," National Conference Social Work, Vol. 55 (1928) 55.

yet those who give themselves to it with complete abandon never lose confidence that it can be realized. That is the foolishness of religion which has the root of wisdom in it.¹

If it is objected that science offers a convenient and honest road to social optimism Niebuhr retorts that it is science itself which supports the conclusions of the modern cynic. He holds that the psychologist and the economist give scientific dignity to the doctrine of the total depravity of man at the moment when the theologian is least inclined to it.² There remains nothing but religion to save him from despair. He must face the facts: the world of sense opposes the world of the ideal; yet must he believe that ultimately they are intimately related. It is the grand paradox:

....for in robust religion, in which moral energy and poetic insight are able to hold their strength against intellectual sophistication, two things are believed: that the ideal and the real are in conflict and that the ideal is the ultimate basis of the real. This is religion's faith in a transcendent and an immanent God. It is a rational absurdity but the root of wisdom is in it.³

Transcendence and immanence together because a higher reason demands it—this is Niebuhr's theology.

It is interesting to note the assumption expressed throughout his preaching that action in the face of the facts tends to generate its own validation. "Faith at its best

¹Niebuhr, "Let the Liberal Churches Stop Fooling Themselves," Christian Century, 48 (March 25, 1931), 403.

²Niebuhr, "A Religion Worth Fighting For," Survey, 54 (August 1, 1927), 446.

³Niebuhr, Education Adequate for Our Times, pp. 27-28.

creates its own evidence and validates its own assumptions."¹
 Criticizing the Barthians—with whose religious temperament he has much in common—he suggests that if they took their social program more seriously they would lose much of their pessimism for "action creates its own eschatology."²

Another shaft that he flings at the devil of doubt makes a fit closing to this discussion of his theology. He clings, he says, to the hope that religious ideals may find application in the modern world because he believes that whatever must be, will be: "What is necessary can not finally be impossible."³

John Dietrich

Mr. Dietrich finds the universe too large to fit into any creed he can formulate. Yet in order to live "nobly and well" he recognizes the need of some foundation and plan which roughly matches his conception of life and his relations to it. The emotions and attitudes resulting constitute his religion.

For the only religion I have is the emotional attitude and the conduct which it inspires, generated by my conception of the universe and my relation to it.⁴

Dietrich affirms an open mind and an absence of dog-

¹Niebuhr, Survey, p. 446.

²Niebuhr, "Barthianism and the Kingdom," Christian Century, 48 (July 15, 1941) 924.

³Niebuhr, Survey, p. 480.

⁴John Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, III (September, 1929) 66.

matism on the question of the existence of God:

Theism involves a belief in a guiding intelligence which is working out some definite purpose; and as I look out upon the universe I see no evidence that the processes of nature are guided by a supreme intelligence aiming at a fore-planned result. But, mark you, I do not deny such intelligence. I see no evidence of it. If ever I find evidence that would justify such a belief, I shall be glad to embrace it.¹

The point of view of the rational theist, he who believes in "a power within the universe, by whose laws we are bound, in whose laws is life, in disobedience to whose laws is death" puzzles Dietrich. "I cannot see," he says, "any relation between such a belief and a belief in God." He is willing, however, to join such a one in attacking anarchy in its practical expression, "practical atheism" distinguished from "speculative atheism." The former means that the self is the only authority and ends in the right of might and the absence of all social obligation. Insofar as it exists, says Dietrich, it is disastrous and deserves all the ill-repute attaching to the term atheist.²

In the interpretation of all life's problems Dietrich takes the historical and scientific approaches rather than the traditional and the theological; his authority is reason rather than institutions or sacred books; he holds to knowledge achieved not by revelation but by systematic inquiry focused upon phenomena. He believes that there is only a

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, II (September, 1929) 19-20.

²Ibid., p. 13.

natural world—there is no supernatural. He cannot bring himself to believe in providence in a universe of natural laws.

....the fundamental difference between orthodox Christian churches and such an institution as this (his church) is this very method of interpretation.¹

Dietrich insists that for all his knowledge he is dependent upon the scientific method.

....my religion consists first in trying to discover what kind of world I live in, and what kind of being I am. And for this knowledge, I turn to the scientific method....And on this do I depend entirely for my body of knowledge; and while this body of knowledge is incomplete and inadequate, it is the only knowledge that I can safely trust—and it is gradually and constantly growing.²

This sweeping assertion does not deter him from saying that humanism allows for either the mechanist or the vitalist explanation of life. "The ideals and purposes and methods of Humanism are entirely independent of these two interpretations of the universe."³

The humanist, Dietrich holds, is no rationalist. The latter, historically, has treated reason as a faculty of the mind while the former holds that intelligence, found in varying degrees in different people, is the instrument in human experience to help find the way out of difficulties.⁴

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, III (September, 1929) 10-11.

²Ibid., III, 68.

³Ibid., II, 43.

⁴Ibid.

He thinks that suffering does not constitute any great problem. It should be accepted as a fact and used if possible to serve man. At any rate it should be abated insofar as possible.¹

He of course does not believe in immortality, nor even in the immortality of influence which he feels is a consolation offered in lieu of immortality. Quality is substituted for quantity of life. "....it is better to live gloriously for a brief period than to drag out a meager existence thro eternity...."²

Man's great need is to recognize his power and possibility.

It is not faith in God that the world demands today, it is faith in ourselves and our fellows to accomplish the things that are necessary to the enrichment of human life.³

His optimism is as great as is Niebuhr's pessimism:

The gates to the realms of knowledge have just recently been opened by the scientific method,....And as this knowledge increases and becomes potent in the lives of many, it will sweep the race along to higher and higher levels, to mounts of achievement beyond our view, especially if we use it for the basis of our religion....⁴

Something should be said about Dietrich's conception of the moral law because it is, in a real sense, his substitute for God. Sometimes what he says about it does not in

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, III, 35.

²Ibid., II, 43.

³Ibid., III, 31.

⁴Ibid., III, 70.

the least suggest such a parallel:

Morality....is primarily the expression of human relationships; and the laws of morality are simply a summary or description of these relationships and their results.¹

At other times his figure becomes rather bold:

There is nothing mysterious about the moral law. It is no more of a mystery than the study of the way in which different chemical elements act upon one another, and the formulation of chemical laws from such study.²

Going into the matter just a little farther, we see that he admits "the moral law" to be man-made only insofar as men formulate it.

The conditions are there just the same, and the formulation of the law is merely the result of the discovery of those conditions.³

And so he passes rapidly to the sentence which gives independent existence and, by implication, external authority, to "the moral law":

What I am trying to show you is that the moral law, while man-made is independent of our changing opinions about it.⁴

Any man who depends entirely upon the scientific method for his body of knowledge must have a difficult task in correlating his science with such a strange entity as an independent "moral law."

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, II, 104.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., II, 105.

⁴Ibid.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Harry Emerson Fosdick is the most popular and widely known exponent of modernism in America. His theology in a word might be described as faith in the God revealed in Christ and the consecration of power in the service of His kingdom. It is not authoritarian in any strict sense, but a sentence from the Bible, or other revered source, while given ostensibly in illustration, subtly substitutes for logic, statistics or other implements of reason. For example:

Adoration springs from the deeps of man's spirit. We never can be content with looking down on things beneath us, nor with looking out on things that find our level. We always must look up to things above us. As a medieval saint said, 'The soul can never rest in things that are beneath itself.' Worship, therefore,¹ is an undeniable impulse in man's heart.²

Fosdick's cosmology originates in an abhorrence of anarchy both in the physical and social realms:

A purposeless physico-chemical mechanism which accidentally came from nowhere and is headed nowhere, which cannot be banked on for moral solvency, and to which we have no more ultimate significance than the flowers have to the weather—that is the scientific universe without religion.³

In the spiritual realm, also, man has an ingrained and despotic impatience of chaos. A world of moral topsy-turvy without unity and sense in it is as intolerable for (*sic*) his mind as his physical environment would be, left unorganized and whimsical. He can-

¹Italics mine.

²Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Meaning of Faith, p. 61. New York: Association Press, 1917.

³Fosdick, Adventurous Religion and Other Essays, p. 149. New York: Harper & Bros., 1926.

not stand it....To tell him that his spiritual life is a haphazard accident which straggled into transient existence as a by-product of a process physically caused and determined is to make nonsense out of the highest values that man knows.¹

Of course, Fosdick has dispensed with the quaint and convenient anthropomorphism of tradition, which set an old gentleman several miles in the sky with an ear attuned to his protégés' difficulties.² The notion of an "outside God" he equates with alchemy and astrology.³ But the sacrifice of imagery to new facts does not destroy the essential meaning conveyed by the old imagery: "....For while thought-forms do change, whether in the first century, the sixteenth, or the twentieth, the abiding experiences of the soul do not change...."⁴ And again:

A thousand outward situations and the mental frameworks in which we phrase experience—they are new, but down beneath that, where we most deeply live, how much is new?⁵

If then we ask what is the essential meaning "down beneath," we arrive at the concept of personality and the explicit notion of a personal God guaranteeing the "moral solveney" of the universe:

....Even people who deny God try to get this motive for themselves. One such man hopes for the

¹Fosdick, Adventurous Religion, p. 149.

²Fosdick, The Meaning of Faith, pp. 70-71.

³Fosdick, "Why Be Religious Anyway?" The Church Monthly, 6 (April, 1932) 367.

⁴Fosdick, Adventurous Religion, p. 245.

⁵Fosdick, "The Old Religion in the New World," The Church Monthly, 5 (October, 1931) 42.

success of his favorite causes in 'the tendency of the universe'; another talks about 'the nature of things taking sides.' But nothing save personality has moral tendencies, and only persons take sides in moral issues....When men like Livingstone have gone out in sacrificial adventure for the saving of men they have not banked on the 'tendency of the universe,' nor trusted in any abstract 'nature of things taking sides'; they have been servants of a personal God, under orders from him, and they have counted on personal guidance in the service of a cause whose issue was safe in God's hands.¹

This Livingstone reference is similar to the medieval saint above and fails to take into account the vast differences between the conceptions of the physical universe held by Livingstone and by the modern man.

For Fosdick God is not only personal and a guarantor of moral ends, but he is an active participant in the moral struggle:

....That God himself is pledged to the victory of righteousness in men and in the world, that he cares, forgives, enters into man's struggle with transforming power, and crowns the long endeavor with triumphant character....²

This conception of the universe is not finally demonstrable. It is not, however, unreasonable and it is required by the moral necessities of life.

After a vivid description of the societal chaos following a "secular prescription" applied to the law, to economics, and to politics, Fosdick calls for a spiritual basis for life as the only escape from complete moral collapse:

¹Fosdick, The Meaning of Faith, pp. 59-60.

²Ibid., p. 20.

....no secular prescription can cure our deep disease. Once more, as so often in history, twist and turn as we will, we will come at last to the towering fact that the soul of all reformation is reformation of the soul.¹

All of this requires a leap of faith. And Fosdick defines faith clearly enough. It is

....holding reasonable convictions, in realms beyond the reach of final demonstration, and....thrusting out one's life upon those convictions as though they were surely true. Faith is vision plus valor.²

To some this leap will be too difficult. Fosdick urges all such to begin with faith in man. This is a good beginning—"within striking distance of the Christian God."

An agnostic who reverently shares Jesus' attitude toward man has a fairer claim to the name Christian than a baptized pagan with a correct theology, whose human relationships are untouched by the spirit of the master.³

Fosdick can say this because he holds that the liberals, as opposed to the fundamentalists, are driving at nothing short of the reformation of Christianity. At this point he sounds a warning and assumes the double role of leader of the offensive against obscurantism and defender of the faith of the fathers. Let us not, he urges, deceive ourselves concerning the difficulties of the task before us. Our recovery of essential Christianity can be achieved by no "mere holding of up-to-date opinions." Wisdom, patience and high strategy are required:

¹Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 6:369.

²The Meaning of Faith, p. 12.

³Adventurous Religion, p. 42.

It is going to take spiritual insight, sacrificial patience, and constructive statesmanship to recover the essential principles of Jesus, make them dominant in the church and in the world.¹

For there is a brand of liberalism in religion, says Fosdick, which, in its zeal for cleansing the temple of deadening tradition, strips the altar of religion itself; like the housewife who cleaned the stains from her table cloth with nitric acid.

A great deal of our theological liberalism is doing that today. Contemporary religion, it says, is soiled; it is stained; it needs to be reformed. I do not see how any man with half an eye can doubt it. But nitric acid will not get us anywhere.²

Fosdick here is protesting against the blind optimism of certain liberal schools—a protest loudly echoed by another of our preachers, Reinhold Niebuhr. Man is not a simple bio-chemical organism. He is a creature at war with himself, lost utterly except he find a savior:

For man is a sinner....His sins clothe the world in lamentation. Yet in him is a protest that he cannot stifle. He is the only creature whom we know whose nature is divided against itself. He hates his sin even when he commits it. He repents, tries again, falls, rises, stumbles on—and in all his best hours cries aloud for saviorhood.³

How, then, can we summarize the theological position of Fosdick? He defined it best himself in his essay "What Christian Liberals Are Driving At":

¹Fosdick, Adventurous Religion, pp. 239-40.

²Fosdick, "The Conservative and Liberal Temperaments," The Church Monthly, 1 (March, 1927) 7.

³Fosdick, The Meaning of Faith, pp. 19-20.

....not primarily a set of opinions; it is a spirit of free inquiry which wishes to face the new facts, accept whatever is true, and state the abiding principles of Christian faith in cogent and contemporary terms. Liberals differ about innumerable details. Some believe in the virgin birth and some do not; some would state the atonement one way and some another. But their agreement is deep and essential; they believe in the central affirmations of Christianity, the living God, the divine Christ, the indwelling Spirit, forgiveness, spiritual renewal, the coming victory of righteousness on earth, the life everlasting.¹

Growing out of an enlarging spiritual experience, dwelling in the fruitful areas of affirmation, not of denial, it ripens into a daring and effective statesmanship for the kingdom of God: such is Fosdick's conception and ideal of liberal Christianity.²

Ernest Fremont Tittle

Ernest Fremont Tittle's theology is very similar to that of Fosdick. The moral necessity of cosmic order and purpose, the Christ-like character of God, the reasonableness and value of the leap of faith which make these doctrines alive and efficacious—in all this he echoes the more famous exponent of modernism.³ There is a slight difference in emphasis on two points. Tittle tends to make more of the doctrine of an active God.

....(a). God who enters into history, who makes history, who today is making for a more just and efficient economic order, a more human and brotherly social order, a more secure and peaceable political order....It means

¹Fosdick, Adventurous Religion, p. 245.

²Ibid., p. 240.

³See "What Does It Mean To Be a Christian," and "On Being a Christian."

the quest of the ages is a double quest concerning which it is no more true to say that we are seeking God than it is to say that God is seeking us.¹.... (it) means that a man like Jesus is not only humanity lifting up its best on a cross but a divinity stooping to share 'our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear.'²

But one must not take this as intended quite literally. The purposeful character of the universe is illustrated by the Russian Five-Year Plan and, says Tittle, this is "only another way of saying that it (Soviet Russia) does after all believe in God."³ This is using traditional terms in a very poetic fashion.

The second difference is Tittle's greater use of the example of Jesus as normative and decisive in moral and theological questions. He says in a Christmas sermon:

Speaking for myself, this contemplation of the point of view of Jesus is now and always a very salutary experience. It removes some of the scales from my eyes. It helps me more fully to perceive what it is that is really meaningful—not Betelgeuse, but the mind of Plato, the heart of Abraham Lincoln.... Unless you and I do contemplate the point of view of Jesus, and contemplate it with a view to making it our own, not only will we fail to see the real significance of Christmas, we shall fail to discover the real meaning and value of life.⁴

The same misfortune will follow any rejection of Jesus' theology. "Christian idealism is rooted in Christian faith...." Indeed, it is rooted so deeply that "if Christian faith should be destroyed, it is extremely doubtful whether Christian ideal-

¹Ernest Fremont Tittle, sermon entitled "The Divine Initiative," pp. 13, 15.

²Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³Tittle, sermon entitled "The Need of Religion," p. 11.

⁴Tittle, sermon entitled "Size and Significance," p. 23.

ism would long survive." So Christianity is something more than the spirit of Christ. It is that spirit strengthened and illuminated by Christ's faith in the power and goodness of God.¹

It illuminates Tittle's theological position merely to repeat questions he asks, such as, What would Jesus say about mass production, big business and the statement that 'Betelgeuse has wiped out the notion of God.'²

The longer he preaches the deeper becomes his conviction that this Christianity is not only one of the ways but the only way to escape from the neurosis, the international anarchy, and the threatening despair of a machine age.³

John Haynes Holmes

"My thought," says Holmes, "is built upon the reality of religion. The subject matter of religion results from the reaction of man to the whole of the universe. The nature of a vital religion, he holds, should be organic, growing, not structural or rigid."⁴ Holmes has not yet thought the last thought on this subject, however. He admits he is somewhat of an agnostic:

....I have not yet come to the point in my life when I can define my religion in these cosmic

¹Tittle, sermon entitled "What It Means to be a Christian."

²Tittle, sermon entitled "Size and Significance," pp. 19f.

³Tittle, sermon entitled "Christianity in Machine Age," p. 20. ⁴John Haynes Holmes, "My Religion," The Community Pulpit, Series 1928-29, No. 1, p. 4.

terms. My reaction on the universe is vivid, but is too confusing for definition, too overwhelming for formulation. My experience is still in the realm of chaos and not of order. I am too much of an agnostic to feel any confidence that I can bring light out of darkness which, for me at least, is still brooding over the face of the deep.¹

There is, then, no finality in his religion. He says so flatly: "I have long since given up the idea of dealing with finalities in my preaching."² But—and there seems always to be a "but" somewhere in this sort of discourse:

....Meanwhile I have had to keep on going! I have had to lay hold upon certain working principles of life. I have had to find convictions and ideas which would serve me until I could discover, if ever, what was finally and absolutely true. And it is these convictions and ideas—these working principles of faith—which constitute the religion of my days.³

What are these working principles? Beginning with man, Holmes discovers what he calls "the moral law" to be an achievement of man.⁴ Granting that "conscience no longer presents itself to us as the voice of God in the soul of man, but as the accumulated pressure of the past upon a spiritual organism which has sprung from out this past," Holmes yet maintains something more. Speaking of Charles Lamb's refusal to marry and so perchance pass on the taint of insanity in his blood, Holmes admits that:

¹Holmes, "My Religion," p. 4.

²Holmes, "The Dilemma of the Moral Life," Series 1930-31, No. 3, pp. 7-8.

³Holmes, "My Religion," p. 5.

⁴Ibid., pp. 9-10.

We may argue in such cases, that the persons concerned are acting not upon necessity but upon deliberate choice. But I prefer to believe that such persons are moved by some high compulsion like that of conscience and the moral law. Their decision is like that of Martin Luther, 'God help me, I cannot do otherwise.'¹

The moral law in man is matched by the "iron law of compensation in the universe:"

Compensation means that there is an iron law in this universe that every evil shall be accompanied with good, that every loss shall bring along its gain....There is no element of choice in this matter, be it noticed; it depends, so far as man is concerned, upon no effort or struggle on his part. Compensation, as Emerson so wonderfully describes it, is wrought into the very fibre of the universe. It works as gravitation works, as evolution works, from the sheer necessity of the processes of life.²

It must be said that this is a strong position to take for one who has renounced all finality. Yet Holmes will not avow a theistic position. He says the theist holds that God has ever been the same, that he "lives within the universe, that he works in man, and moulds him to an evergrowing apprehension of his being."³ And Holmes does not believe in a static God. "Every age must find its own God, for the gods of the past will never suffice for the needs of the present."⁴ He will not avow the humanist position either. Since the humanist maintains that the ideal, personified by the God con-

²Ibid., pp. 12-13.

³Holmes, "What's Happening to God?" Series 1925-26, No. 17, passim.

⁴Holmes, "Is There a Place for Faith in Modern Life?" Series 1924-25, No. 13, p. 13.

cept, is the projection of purely human ideals and is to be realized wholly by human effort,¹ Holmes cannot accede to the humanist position. His conclusion is that of the modern theist: "....Ultimate truth may be somewhere between these two propositions, or represent a culmination of the two."²

For Holmes, as already indicated, believes that there is an ultimate truth. However ready he is to admit ignorance of it in any detail, he makes the momentous admission of ultimate truth in his sermon, "My Religion":

As a matter of fact I am convinced that there exists an absolute Right, as I am equally convinced that there exists an absolute Truth. We all of us feel, as we watch the processes of science—as we see Einstein, for example, plotting his curves through the vast spaces of the unknown—that if the mind of man could ever match the measure of the spheres, he would be able at last to see things as they really are, and thus to know a truth which is final and fundamental.³

And again more explicitly:

And first and foremost among these discoveries I put the reality of right. In saying this, I give my allegiance to no fixed standard of morality. I do not believe for a moment that moral progress has ended, any more than I believe that intellectual progress has ended. I am convinced that a moral code—the Ten Commandments, or any other—is formulated only to be revised, and then revised again. But that behind the question of what is right there is the Right, as behind the question of what is true there is the Truth, this I implicitly believe.⁴

But (even as Holmes himself puts it) this is a kind of parenthesis. His faith in a moral universe is the result of

¹Holmes, "What's Happening to God?" passim.

²Ibid., pp. 18-20.

³Holmes, "My Religion," pp. 3-4.

⁴Ibid., p. 12.

his reflection on the interrelation of man (in whom is the moral law) with the environing universe. Then he goes beyond what is implied here. He says,

....I believe that the universe is moral—that the law of right or truth, or love, call it what you will, is a law pertaining not merely to man but to the whole vast realm in which he lives.¹

If, after these quotations, there is any doubt remaining concerning the unsystematic character of Holmes' theology, the following two paragraphs will help eliminate it:

....What is to me the fact—that, beginning with the experience of man, and reaching out to the farthest pulsations of the cosmos, there is a power which is not merely physical but spiritual in character, a life which is not mechanical but purposive in action, a will which is

....victory and law

When empty terrors overawe.

Humanist as I am in all my thinking, I have never yet gotten to the point when (sic) I did not find it illuminating and inspiring to speak of the righteous life of all the world as God. And I still feel myself uplifted by the line in Faber's familiar hymn, that

Right is right, since God is God.²

¹Holmes, "My Religion," pp. 13-14.

²Ibid., p. 16.

CHAPTER II

WORSHIP

The practical task of ordering the service of worship seems to have accentuated the differences between right and left wing and simplified the division into two groups. Dietrich and Holmes find themselves strictly opposed to any outside help derived. They define worship as aspiration. Fosdick, Niebuhr, and Tittle find power flowing from God into their own lives through communion, adoration, and seeking.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Fosdick, in a very interesting sermon entitled "Technique in Religion" points to one of the major weaknesses of protestantism in the breakdown of its technique of spiritual renewal or worship. He lists the means which were left to us after the break-up of Catholicism: private prayer, family prayers, grace at meals, quiet hours of meditation, reading deliberately directed to spiritual ends, public worship, the memorial of the Lord's Supper. But these things are largely neglected and either their revival or adequate substitutes, he feels, are required—"something to do that will weave the great ideas into the texture of ordinary life."¹

When people say prayer is outmoded they are right if

¹Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 4:4.

they mean certain kinds of prayer. There is magic prayer, "mastering a god"; there is spasmodic prayer, the desperate beggary induced by calamity; there is soporific prayer, doling out, as he says, comfort in maintaining error. But true prayer is not outmoded. For it is the prayer of communion and worship, wherein the ideality of the objects and our adoration of them change us from what we are. And there is the prayer of appropriation—"Prayer is the taking hand; prayer is the assimilating mind; prayer is the appropriating spirit."¹

Worship is not to be confused, however, with adoration. It is a step above it and inseparably allied with the idea of the holy. The following quotation indicates Fosdick's uncertainty while it points to this distinction. He is speaking of experiences in life which have cleansed and renewed, not by their common quality, but by their quality of being apart and above us:

There was a scene in nature that subdued you, or a high hour of music that mastered you, or a great book epoch-making in your life, where you faced a truth that commanded you. Or there was a friendship where esteem and admiration were braided with love, or there was a deed of self-sacrifice in whose presence you felt like taking the shoes from off your feet because the place whereon you stood was holy ground. Or there was a high hour of worship when you saw the heavens open and heard the angels sing, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts.²

¹Fosdick, "What Is Christian Prayer?" The Church Monthly, p. 9.

²Ibid.

This point is stated unequivocally in the following passage:

....the good, true, and beautiful stand above us calling out our adoration, and all the best in us springs from our worshipful response to their appeal. But this impulse to adore is never fulfilled until we gather up all life into spiritual unity and bow down in awe and joy before God. That is adoration glorified, worship crowned and consummated. And the only God whom man can adore with awe and joy is personal. No impersonal thing is worshipful; however great a thing may be it still lies beneath our soul. Only God, thought of in personal terms but known to be greater than any terms which human life can use, is adorable.¹

Ernest Fremont Tittle

Tittle believes that for the special problems of our day, including the problem of the existence and nature of God, worship offers a way of understanding. It cannot aid in their solution intellectually, but liturgy in an appropriate setting can aid faith by deepening experience.

Meanwhile it (religious liberalism) must somehow recover its faith in the existence of God by deepening its experience of the presence of God: which is, in my judgement, the deepest of all meanings of the present revival of interest in worship....trying to use architectural and liturgical forms by which in other days religious faith was expressed and nourished in the hope that in so doing they themselves may once more become sure of God.²

It is interesting to note the latitude with which Tittle treats worship. Prayer, for instance, is aspiration, with eternal things as norms for measurement and sources of

¹Fosdick, The Meaning of Faith, p. 61. See also Adventurous Religion, p. 146.

²Tittle, "The Divine Initiative," pp. 8-9.

inspiration. It is much like the idea of prayer which, as we shall see, Holmes holds:

True prayer is not always vocal. It is possible to pray without closing the eyes or moving the lips. It is possible to offer no petition, even a wordless one, to the throne of grace, but to sit and listen for God to speak. It is possible to elevate the mind to God with an earnest desire to look at life in general, and one's own life in particular, from the standpoint of eternal truth and right. That also is prayer. It is, indeed, the innermost heart of prayer, as some of us are obliged to believe when we consider the prayers of Jesus...."¹

Yet one gets a different slant entirely when one realizes that listening "for God to speak" is seriously intended. The idea of an active God makes prayer not only man's attempt to communicate with God; God, too, is through prayer communicating with man. This idea, like most of Tittle's central ideas, is carried to great lengths.

It means that great art, great poetry, great music are not only our attempt to express the inexpressible but God's attempt to get the inexpressible expressed in our human world.²

Reinhold Niebuhr

The following excerpt on worship from Mr. Niebuhr's Notebook is so clear as to need little comment. It was written in 1924—a long time ago for so young a man—but there is no reason for supposing any great change in this regard. The key words are: "added beauty," "spiritual value,"

¹ Tittle, "Need of Prayer."

² Tittle, "The Divine Initiative," p. 15.

"authentic religious emotion expressed in a well-turned phrase," and "mystic sense of the divine."

Since spending the summer in Europe I have been devoting the entire fall to a development of our worship service. The various types of ritualistic services in non-conformist churches I heard over there appealed to me so much that I decided to imitate them. Of course the Anglican services have their own appeal, but the technique which makes them possible is beyond us. For some years I have been having a few prayer responses, but now I am developing a program with litanies, confessions, acts of praise and every other bit of liturgical beauty and meaning by which the service can be enriched.

It's a shame we have permitted our services to become so barren. My only regret is that I did not wake up in time to build our church properly for liturgical purposes. There could be much pleasure in conducting a richly elaborate liturgical service without restraint of the rubrics to which the Anglicans must submit. I do not know whether the people like the added beauty in the service as much as I do....It seems to me to make a great deal of difference in the spiritual value of a service to have some unison prayer with an authentic religious emotion expressed in a well turned phrase, to have choir responses for the prayers and moments of silence for quiet prayer.

The idea that a formless (sic) service is more spontaneous and therefore more religious than a formal one is disproved in my own experience. Only a very few men have ever really put me in a mood of prayer by their 'pastoral prayers.' On the other hand, a really beautiful worship service actually gives me a mystic sense of the divine.¹

John Haynes Holmes

Holmes finds that "man has again fallen down and worshiped the idol, which is material, and has neglected God, who is spiritual." He is quite sure, therefore, that there

¹Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, p. 60. Chicago: Willett, Clark, & Colby, 1929.

is not only room but need in religion for worshipping what is right and permanent in the structure of the universe. He finds room also for the church "where we can have experiences that lift and cleanse and purify."

--a place where he could meet people on a fine level of association, be prompted to thought upon important questions from the highest point of view; and be brought face to face now and then with eternal things....a place, that is, where we can get away from the trivial and the temporal affairs of the material world, and enter into another world of nobler and loftier character.¹

Here as elsewhere, however, Holmes sets himself off from the typical religionist in insisting on man as central, as the only source of the sacred. "Man and the heart of man are the source from which all sanctities proceed. What is sacred is what man has made." The Bible, the church, Sunday, national symbols, the Constitution, these, insofar as they are sacred, derive their high character from their origin in human aspiration and the significance of their contribution to human advance.²

And just so is man the only variable in our complex environment--the only changing factor and so our only hope. As he says in defining prayer:

Prayer has its place, without any question, as meditation, confession, consecration,--as conscious dedication to the best and highest that we know. But to ask that the drought be ended, the battle won, the sick healed, by the answer of God to the cries of men, is 'vanity of vanities.' The law of

¹Holmes, "Great Possessions," Series No. 10, p. 18.

²Holmes, "Idol Worship in Modern Life," Series No. 6. pp. 21-22.

cause and effect is absolute in this world. The cosmos moves in its way and not in ours.¹

John Hassler Dietrich

Worship, for Dietrich, is aspiration toward the ideal of a perfected human life, "the reaching out after the 'humanity that is to be.'² He reinforces the suggestion made above concerning his substitution of the moral law for God by saying:

I believe that in this enlightened age of the world the moral ideal is the only fit object of intelligent worship, that morality alone is fit to be a religion, that only so far as religion concentrates its worship upon the moral ideal and law has it any saving power.³

Another way of putting Dietrich's conception of worship is to say it strives to bring people together in communion on a high plane. The great need of the world today is solidarity; the fact which stares one in the face on every hand is the multiplicity of forces making for separation and antagonism:

....What people need is to come oftener together on mutual grounds, to know each other in some other and higher relations than those of business, and to feel the impulse from such contacts of some common over-powering interest. And there is only one thing which has even a tendency toward this end and that is the modern humanistic movement, as best exemplified in the humanist church.⁴

This last sentence is a flagrant example of a tendency in this

¹Holmes, "What's Happening to God?" p. 9.

²Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, II, 42.

³Ibid., II, 111.

⁴Ibid., III, 5.

preacher to ruin a valid point of view by making gross overstatements of his case.

Because he feels the need of cultivating social solidarity, Dietrich deliberately seeks to divorce his pulpit from all ideas and movements which divide men:

Therefore I seek to dissociate everything in our church from class feeling and class distinction, and treat everything on the basis of one humanity with a common purpose, a common interest, and a common destiny.¹

What all this means in the practical business of leading a group of people in public worship is illustrated by his "Meditation" following his sermon on "What's Wrong With the Younger Generation?"

Our young people today are set amid the perplexities of a changing order, and face to face with a great new task. May they not permit themselves to become engrossed in senseless pleasures and narrow duties, when the vast needs of humanity call aloud for vision and effort. May they realize that nothing but a resolute facing of all the problems involved and a persistent determination not to rest until they are solved, will quell the restlessness and revolt in the world today. May they be inspired with dauntless courage to uphold the standard of ideal right, and rejoice that to them has been entrusted the solemn responsibility of preserving all that is good in the old order, and at the same time ushering in a new day for humanity.

May we of the older generation sympathize with the ideals and efforts of youth. In our natural desire to preserve the old order, may we not become enemies of emerging truth. In our loyalty to the good of the past, may we not distrust and restrain the voice of this fresh young humanity as it comes up to take our place. May we see life, like the ancient philosopher, as a torch race in which we pass on the torch of truth to the guardianship of the next runner; and may we pass it lit and undimmed to those who come after while they are

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, III, 6-7.

young and fresh to carry it forward, lest we hold it too long, until we falter, and thus lose the race we sought to win.¹

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, I, 17.

CHAPTER III

PERSONAL MORALITY

In the sermons read for this paper, personal morality certainly does not receive the full and explicit treatment which tradition attaches to the historic Christian. Everywhere the preachers lament the prostration of codes, edicts, standards before the whirlwind of relativity in morals. Theist and humanist, radical and conservative, all are vexed and vague, and yet sure that there is a right, if only we can find it. Differences arise as to how to find it. Following the scientific method, worshipping a hero, embracing a great cause, engaging in personality-producing activities, having faith in the moral law, in God and immortality—such is the variagated list.

John Hassler Dietrich

Mr. Dietrich is not oblivious to the value of the "inner life" but he does not regret the loss of the sense of guilt—"this terrible sense of sin," as he calls it, "which has darkened the life of many a good and innocent man and woman."¹

Dietrich follows Holmes in insisting that there is a right and a wrong and in trying to show how these things flow from the nature of things and have nothing statutory about them—"natural and human morality." He talks like a natural-

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, III, 181.

istic theist:

....(morality) is a very part of man's mental structure, developed by evolution, and not something apart from man and thrust upon him; that it is composed of the laws that make for individual and social welfare, wrought out of man's experience, and not of arbitrary commandments handed down by some supernatural being. It is this natural and human morality, necessary to the enrichment of the individual life and the improvement of the social order, that men need to understand if they are to live the good life.¹

For we shall never understand Dietrich or men like him if we do not see how much faith they put upon the motivation of conduct through the understanding. The following passage is illuminating:

So the only way to enforce moral laws, whether we base our ethics on natural or supernatural conceptions, is to establish a relationship between reason and ethical commands—to convince people that observance of the moral law is the reasonable thing to do. When men realize that it is a reasonable thing to put on heavier clothes when the temperature drops and lighter clothes when it rises, they do these things; and just so when men realize that it is the reasonable thing to obey the moral laws, they will obey them. And the reasonableness of the moral laws can best be established by teaching men their evolutionary and natural origin, and the fact that they are conditions upon which life depends.²

This is excellent, one might say, as a statement of principle, though even as such it is rather hazy. But when one comes to apply it to life the principle is not of much use. Here is the vexing problem of censorship. And here is Dietrich saying "I believe absolutely in the principle of social control." Does he, therefore, believe in the institution of

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, II, 84.

²Ibid., II, 108-09.

censorship? No, not as an institution. But why not? Because, he says, I believe "also in the principle of personal liberty," and continues:

....but I am unalterably opposed to the idea of censorship as it is generally understood. I believe that the present situation in literature and the drama needs to be corrected. I believe also that society has a right to interfere and control the publication of books and the presentation of plays; but I do not believe that the censorship as an official institution is the wise and proper kind of social control to use in this case. I believe that we must resort to the democratic method of public opinion and not to the monarchical method of censorship.¹

Dietrich is more satisfactory when he deals with concrete problems. He deals rather conservatively, some would say, with the institution of marriage. After suggesting the desirability of the economic independence of the wife, the value of birth control, of education in sex hygiene and the art of love, and the acceptance of divorce as "the inevitable complement of marriage," he says,

These are mere suggestions of change which I believe should come inside the established condition of marriage....Behind this institution, after all, is the most potent force in life--the insistence of flesh and spirit alike that the ecstasy of mating shall not be denied; and marriage is the best attempt men have been able to make or even conceive, in the task of establishing the ideal conditions under which the basic hunger of life may be satisfied. The relationship of course is imperfect as the men and women who enter it. The solution is not to abandon marriage, but to preserve and transform it until it fulfills our best ideals in regard to it.²

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, IV (May, 1930), 41-42.

²Ibid., II, 126-27.

This notion of holding on to the past for purposes of maintaining values and modifying its institutional defects is not a natural sentiment with Mr. Dietrich and deserves comment.

Ernest Fremont Tittle

Tittle does not treat the problem of personal morals specifically. He sees what everyone sees—the chaos, the blundering and the misery. He lives and preaches in a university community. The experimental morality of youth flouts itself on every hand. He comments on it:

Moral codes, youth reasons, are the creations not of God but of man. They are not therefore sacred, inviolate. They are just as properly objects of study, of revaluation and revision as is anything else which man has made. Any adult who says otherwise is either ignorant, hypocritical, or deplorably timid; and on that assumption there is almost no field of personal conduct in which our young sophisticates are not, willing and even eager to do a little experimenting.¹

He seems to commit himself only to one principle, that is, it is not wise to indulge desire uncritically in the face of the accumulated wisdom of the race.

He tells a sad tale of a young man who did this and came to grief. It is the tale of many a young person in these distraught and erratic days, says the preacher. He comes to grief

....because he fails to see life steadily and see it whole; because he sees life at just one flaming point, his own immediate, passionate desire, and is blind to everything else....There are many people in our blunder-

¹Tittle, "Fathers and Sons," p. 7.

ing world who manage in one way or another to make a mess of life, not because they are incredibly stupid or because they are incredibly wicked, but because they are terribly muddled....A vivid sense of the reality of God enables one to see life steadily and see it whole.¹

John Haynes Holmes

Mr. Holmes has only ostensibly given up all certainty in his preaching. He believes that people want to do right. This is surprising, coming from one of Mr. Holmes's experience, but it is what he says. He is a bit vague about the mechanics of the thing, but he is sure it is so. He says:

Deep down within us there is an instinct, an intuition—call it what you will—that holds us to the ethical concepts of standards and ideals. The word 'ought' is still the most impressive and potent word in all our language. I am as safe today as ever (sic) in my first assumption that men and women with few exceptions, are eager to do the right.²

More than that, he believes that there is always a right for them to do. And this last he calls a "very simple and practical fact:"

....in every moral difficulty there is a moral way out. Through every problem, be it small or be it large, there runs a line of conduct which is right, in contradistinction to every other line of conduct which is wrong.³

One of the great problems in present day morals is that of finding the right way. For though it is there, it is hard to find. His definition of moral innocence is good

¹Tittle, "Need of Prayer," pp. 12-13.

²Holmes, "The Dilemma of the Moral Life," p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 5.

but not definitive—an activity he says is innocent when its indulgence is "not at the expense of the moral integrity of ourselves and of our fellows."¹ More explicit ways of guiding ourselves include living in the open, doing nothing you would be ashamed of; refraining from doing what you would not have all the world do; trying to eliminate yourself from the reckoning; devoting yourself to a great cause; and following a great leader.²

In a sermon called "Great Possessions," Holmes urges his people to embrace a great cause—it is the argument so well put by Josiah Royce:

I doubt if any man has ever been truly great who has not been devoted to a cause. I doubt if any life can be small or mean or insignificant which takes some cause as the end and aim of action. So look abroad in your world and find the cause which you would serve. It will enoble you and give you joy.³

In his very interesting sermon on "The Dilemma of the Moral Life," Holmes suggests surrender of oneself to a great human spirit; for himself it is Gandhi:

I have myself found incalculable help and guidance in recent years in taking Gandhi for my example. If I have been tempted to write an angry letter, I have asked myself, Would Gandhi write such a letter? If I have been irritated by some selfish bore who has stolen my time to serve his own designs and purposes, I have said to myself, How would Gandhi treat this person? If I have found myself perplexed as to what to do in this instance or in that, I have again and again inquired within my heart, What would Gandhi tell

¹Holmes, "Great Possessions," p. 13.

²Holmes, "The Dilemma of the Moral Life," passim.

³Holmes, "Great Possessions," p. 20.

me to do if I should ask him? I know of no better way to find the right than to heed the example of the men who have themselves triumphantly lived the right.¹

There may be doubts along the way, and we may never attain to the Absolute Right (though it does exist) but we may gladly and with profit follow these guides in the direction of the right toward which they point.²

Reinhold Niebuhr

In a very moving sermon called "The Illusions of the Righteous,"³ Niebuhr repeats his reflections, already mentioned in the section dealing with his theology, on the deep pathos of human life and of sin, calling it "the tragic beauty of human life." The tragedy is the sin—implanted in man's nature—his pettiness, his predatory character, and his almost absolute corruptibility. Such statements as the following give a clear picture of Niebuhr's idea of human nature: "Stoicism says 'Love because you're as good; Christianity says, 'Love because you're as bad.'" "After all, men are a petty breed." "Might is always unethical." "Absolute power, absolute corruption."

And so, inevitably there is a note of pessimism that grows, at times, very loud. There remains nothing in all the world but to maintain one's own moral integrity.

¹Holmes, "Great Possessions," p. 11.

²Holmes, ibid., passim.

³Niebuhr, University Chapel. See also Survey, August 1, 1927, p. 445.

One ought to strive for the reformation of society rather than one's own perfection. But society resists every effort to bring its processes under ethical restraint so stubbornly that one must finally be satisfied with preserving one's moral integrity in a necessary but futile struggle.

And he adds, rather vaguely,

Of course the struggle is never as futile as it seems from an immediate perspective.¹

But the picture is not altogether black. Men are not honest by nature and some are not willing to be honest when their self-deceptions are profitable. But, says Niebuhr,

....most of us, autocrats and preachers alike, are quasi-honest men who might become more honest if someone dealt with our deceptions with kindly honesty.²

And here, too, we are reminded of that somewhat mystical "unconscious wisdom" that works in persons willy-nilly. He is talking about a friend, a college professor who is experimenting with the institution of marriage.

He thinks marriage is destructive of freedom, and therefore he and his wife have reached an agreement which permits each absolute liberty....Yet there is no complete happiness....High sounding principles may beguile them from loyalty to instinctive attitudes; but an unconscious wisdom, implanted by ages of bitter experience, has a way of asserting and avenging itself.³

The beauty of life is discovered in the "inner struggle" and the "secret courage" of the "average life"; and the way of salvation is through discipline which to Niebuhr means

¹Niebuhr, Notebook, p. 73.

²Niebuhr, Christian Century, June 18, 1930.

³Niebuhr, Atlantic Monthly, 143:790.

"inner spiritual agony."¹ And the hope is found in man's ability to repent. He can be true to himself by standing outside himself, convicted with higher goals. Niebuhr makes a good deal of repentance one way and another. The terms change but the idea of inner conflict, remorse and renewed dedication are everywhere present in his writing. He finds a place for the church in supporting this struggle and renewing this courage—in reinforcing man against "the indignities which nature and civilization heap upon (him)."²

Finally, man is not malicious—he is unintelligent—and the way out, we may infer, is a wise pedagogy. This does not square with many insinuations and direct charges against human nature but we must not press the matter of consistency against one who so openly disavows such a virtue.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Mr. Fosdick finds the world in difficult straits with need for such personal and social character as only a reasoned and righteous religion can produce:

And now history repeats itself and we are thrown out into a new, strange generation, a needy generation, perilously needy. And what it needs is a quality of character and social life that we never will get without a high-minded, intelligent, ethical religion.³

He sees the present moral scene as epitomized in the

¹Niebuhr, "The Illusions of the Righteous."

²Niebuhr, Survey, 58:445.

³Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 5:258.

"breakdown of traditional behavior."¹ The children of this age are on their own—they need help, not recrimination:

The children of today are independent and nothing can keep them from being so. The more vigorous and worth while they are the more independent they will be, but they are not being trained for it. They are going out as though independence were an easy matter to handle whereas of all fine arts it is the finest and most difficult.²

Fosdick sees only one principle that will guarantee an eventual rehabilitation of the social structure. It is the prizing of personality and the judging of all activity by what effect it has upon personality; it is:

Reverence for personality so that nothing is so valuable as personality, nothing so wicked as hurting personality, nothing so right as lifting personality to a more abundant life. Whatever elevates and enriches personality in ourselves and others is right. Whatever depresses and impoverishes personality in ourselves and others is wrong.³

A mean temper, making it hard for people to live with you; lust, using people for your own ends; selfishness, seeing the world only in terms of your own narrow interests; these are the enemies of personality and their opposites are personality-producing, to use a rather technical phrase. In brief, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." And so Fosdick makes his transition to the spiritual basis of morality. For love, represented in Christ, has a dynamic of its own and leaves us no peace till we embrace it with our wills and our

¹Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 3:150.

²Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 4:63.

³Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 3:150.

lives:

Can it be that there is no one here who is being pursued by that Hound of Heaven? You cannot keep Christ back in history. He presses on to become the Christ of experience.¹

¹Fosdick, The Church Monthly, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 28.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

The preachers do not seem to have thought out their conceptions of human nature. There is rhapsodizing and deprecating almost simultaneously. Man is a sinner, man is vile, yet his possibilities for improvement are boundless. Or man is more or less good and intelligent and institutions warp and debase him. Or man is half-brute and half-angel. There seems to be much agreement on the assertion of the helplessness of individuals, as individuals, in the struggle for moral integrity. The need for making the world Christian (or social) before persons can be entirely Christian or social seems to be recognized by all.

The relation between the preacher's theology and his social philosophy receives little clarification from this study.

John Hassler Dietrich

"He who created the gods can create the Superman,"¹ says Dietrich. This gives one an idea of the capacity this preacher attributes to his kind. Further, he holds that the worth which he attaches to life is a worth that inheres in human nature itself:

....our idea of the glory of humanity is not based on any reflection from above....we know of nothing above

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, III, 12.

or beyond (man), the highest things of which we can dream are but the products of his mind, and so man should be the end of our allegiance and our endeavor.¹

Yet these demi-gods are almost the creatures of circumstances; speaking of moral standards and theological belief he says:

My general observation is that people of the same grade of intelligence and placed in a similar environment have about the same standards of morality, regardless of whether they are Presbyterians or Unitarians, Roman Catholics or Atheists—with a balance in favor of the unbeliever, because he is likely to be more intelligent than the rigidly orthodox and because many of the orthodox use religion as a cloak for their rascality.²

Salvation has come to have a vastly different meaning for Dietrich—not symptoms or systems of redemption but the removal of unfavorable circumstances—this is salvation:

Instead of letting people grow up in conditions that produce evil lives and then seek to save them by schemes of redemption, we would in so far as possible remove the causes of evil.³

Man will create the Superman, we may assume from his preaching, by modifying environment and adjusting individual and social behavior to those universal conditions formulated into what are known as the moral laws. This modification will come about through the application of knowledge—there is something of awe attaching to that word:⁴

The devil then is not the author of evil. It is only human maladjustment to the physical and social

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, II, 44.

²Ibid., III, 29.

³Ibid., III, 8.

⁴Ibid., II, 78-79.

conditions in which man is compelled to live....This is the great dragon. And knowledge is the St. George that will overthrow and slay it.¹

There seems to be a slight confusion in the mind of this preacher as to the function of the pulpit. He says it is not his idea to have the church take the place of the Prohibition Society, the League of Women Voters, or the Labor Movement; it must be a "vision" and a "challenge":

This pulpit so long as I occupy it shall never become the propagandist platform of any political or social program, but rather an inspiration and stimulus to social and political reform in general, while each individual may work along the line in which he most heartily believes and to which he is best adapted. Not a theory of reform but a vision and a challenge to action is what I seek to give.²

Yet he boldly says that zeal without knowledge will get us nowhere.

The thing needed is to face frankly all the factors involved, to understand the real issues at stake, to realize how things have come to be as they are, and all the many obstacles that stand in the way of making changes, to seek out all the facts impartially and disinterestedly, to be willing to experiment, etc.³

Unfortunately we are not told how this seeming contradiction is resolved. The matter is not clarified by his personal declaration on socialism:

....our chief task becomes the improvement of our social institutions. And to this end the first thing to be done is to study its raw materials, its

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, II, 79.

²Ibid., III, 8-9.

³Ibid., I, 15.

laws of growth, how it is put together, and apply remedies to its imperfections, even though that should involve its entire reorganization. People sometimes call me a Socialist. I am no more interested in political Socialism than I am in Republicanism or any other political ism. But if a believer in making society better by means of scientific treatment is a Socialist, then of course I am a Socialist.¹

He distinctly disavows faith in the philosophy, purpose, ethics, or methods of the Bolsheviki or Communists.²

Dietrich is a pacifist. He sees Armistice Day abused and in his anti-war sermon comments:

Here is a day which should be used to count up the losses of war, to describe its horrors, to present its futilities, and to pledge the people forever against it; and yet it is used to magnify national greatness, to glorify the idea of war, and to fit the mind for further military preparedness. Here is a day on which we should have immense gatherings of men and women to hold up their hands and lift their voices in solemn oath never to take part in another war; instead we have military parades and public ceremonies in which war is sanctified in the name of the heroic dead.³

Ernest Fremont Tittle

For Tittle human nature is a strange combination of the brute and the angel.⁴ He is rather specific about what needs to be opposed in modern society to help the angel prevail. He is in revolt, for instance, against the creeds as definitions of Christian goals:

¹Dietrich, The Humanist Pulpit, III, 9-10.

²Ibid., I, 14.

³Ibid., II, 49.

⁴Tittle, "The Divine Initiative."

Our present dissatisfaction with the historic creeds of Christendom lies, not so much in what they say, as in what they leave unsaid. Some of us would like to rise up on Sunday morning and say 'I believe in the brotherhood of man. I believe in the possibility of a Christian fellowship which shall raze all barriers of race, and nation, and color, and class, and unite the peoples of earth by bonds so strong that not even the dogs of war could rend them.'¹

Inevitably he harks back to "what Jesus" saw or said or felt about human beings. That is, Jesus respected personality. Therefore, if you would be Christian, you, too, must respect personality.²

The role of the church is inspirational and energizing and conscience-provoking:

The religion of Jesus is not a religion for comfortable, complacent, middle-aged persons who have had their fling, and made their pile, and are ready now to settle down. It is a religion only for youth, and for people, of whatever age, who keep their spirits eternally young. To live in the present inspired by the heroic past, and not content with any present achievement, to struggle unceasingly for a nobler future—is not this, also, involved in being a Christian?³

He then becomes bolder. The religion of Jesus (and by inference the church which professes to serve him) has never undertaken to keep things as they are:

We cannot too often remind ourselves that Christianity began as a revolutionary movement....Nor can we too often remind ourselves that essential Christianity will continue to be a revolutionary movement until the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven. Institutionalized Christianity will strive, like other vested interests, to maintain the order of which it is a part, but the spirit of Christ will

¹Tittle, "What Does It Mean To Be a Christian?"

²Tittle, "On Being Christian," p. 18.

³Ibid.

strive to upset any order which does not embody the will of God.¹

How is the present order to be changed? To change the goals of life:

My own belief is that the only way to secure relief for the jaded nerves of a machine-driven civilization is to change the character of human ambition from lust to possess something into eagerness to create something.²

Why get excited about it just now? Because this is the hour of destiny:

(our hearts) might....be filled with a kind of exhilaration in an hour when history is being made over night and may be made gloriously—an hour when an old order which, from first to last, has caused a vast deal of suffering has broken down, and we have at very least a fighting chance to build a new order, a more just and rational order, in which abysmal poverty and enforced unemployment shall be no more, neither shall there be war any more.³

And the motto of the new world will be service. Much of life is now guided by this motive, why should not all of life be so guided?

Hospitals, schools, should serve us....And our newspapers? Why should not they likewise be expected to serve us? We could not endure a world in which nobody was willing to live and labor unselfishly. Why should we be content with a world in which a few persons are expected to serve and a multitude of persons are expected to be served? If anybody should sigh and say, 'Ah but that is the kind of world which we have had for some fifty thousand years,' the observation would be irrelevant. It does not follow because we have had that kind of world for fifty thousand years that we must have it forever and ever.⁴

¹Tittle, "On Being a Christian," p. 18.

²Tittle, "Christianity In a Machine Age," p. 19.

³Tittle, "Be Not Afraid," pp. 18-19.

⁴Tittle, "On Being a Christian," pp. 15-16.

This sounds very much like socialism. So it is, in diluted form--Owen D. Young's socialism:

Christianity, however, makes no exceptions. It does not say one thing to missionaries and another thing to manufacturers. To missionaries and manufacturers, teachers and tradesmen, preachers and plumbers, it says, 'Your first consideration must be your responsibility to the community, not to your own private profit.' England does expect, not merely a few heroes, but every man to do his duty. Christianity does expect, not merely a few idealists, but every man, in the main drive of his life, to be unselfish. When in that notable address which he delivered at the dedication of the Harvard School of Business, Mr. Owen D. Young declared that 'the ministers of our business, like the ministers of our churches, must appreciate their responsibility,' he was voicing the demand of Jesus.¹

But it is a little more than that. Tittle believes a more equal distribution of wealth is in prospect and says so in a bold sermon:

If it be true that what we are suffering from is, by and large, not overproduction but rather underconsumption, it is evident that there needs to be a more equal distribution of wealth in order that more and more people may be able to buy what our machines are able to produce; and if there should be a more equal distribution of wealth, it would follow as the night the day that some of us would have more to spend than we now have, and that some of us would have less--²

You can tell a good deal about a man by the type of enemies he makes. Tittle should rate fairly well by such a measure, for his chief opponents in the politico-economic arena are the Chicago Tribune and the American Legion. As in his traditional theology so in his aggressive reform

¹Tittle, "On Being a Christian," p. 14.

²Tittle, "Be Not Afraid," p. 14.

measures he differs greatly from Dietrich.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Niebuhr may be called the modern reaction against Channing liberalism in religion. The old joke about Universalists believing God was too good to punish men in hell and the Unitarians believing men were too good to deserve punishment illustrates pretty well the attitude of our ex-Lutheran pastor. "The modern church," he says, "is too consistent in its appreciation of human nature." And the same may be said of its conception of nature:

The necessity of accommodating its apologetics to the theory of evolution drove it into a philosophical monism which is ethically almost as dangerous as mechanistic naturalism. The universe is simply not the beautiful Greek temple pictured in the philosophy of the absolutists and the monists.¹

And in this universe of good in conflict with evil, man's nature draws him down—it is anti-social: "imperialistic and parasitic."²

The task of the church and its leadership is to relate the Christian tradition to the facts of contemporary life. To historical perspective must be added a deep knowledge of human nature—including the natures of the leaders themselves.³ For this human nature is not a beautiful Greek temple either. Hear Mr. Niebuhr talk about it:⁴ "The human

¹Niebuhr, Survey, 54:445.

²Niebuhr, Notebook, p. 89.

³Niebuhr, Christian Century, June 18, 1930, p. 779.

⁴Niebuhr, "Not Many Mighty"; "Illusions of Righteous."

soul is naturally dishonest." "There is an inevitable pretension in all your aspiration"; "hypocrisy is always a corollary of virtue." "We rationalize in ideal terms our interest"; "we have a hound-dog's nose for rationalization." "I believe man is sinful." And finally and we must say grossly, "the processes of life produce their own filth." It is a strictly Lutheran conception of kinship which he offers the brethren—not equality on the basis of health but of sickness. The Stoic, he says, urged love of one's fellows because one is as good as they; the Christian urges the same feeling because one is as bad.

But hopeless as this seems, Niebuhr's inconsistency saves him again. Human nature is vicious, no doubt, but it is not altogether responsible for the difficulties of these times. Any realistic application of the traditional Christian truths to contemporary life cannot but take into the most serious account the evils of our individualistic traditions.¹

The two sermons which he preached in Chicago January 31, 1932, contain an arraignment of power and of those who hold it, which for directness and vigor are not matched by any sermons of the other preachers in this study. He speaks of the "unconscious arrogance of conscious power." He asserts that "no class has ever been just except under pressure." "Might is always unethical" is another. He quotes Lord Acton

¹Niebuhr, Notebook, p. 96.

with entire approval: "Absolute power means absolute corruption." And he speaks of the "wise" who bow the knee to power as "the flunkys of the mighty."

The ideas behind these phrases lead him to assert that what the wise man knows—that not a thing worth doing can fully succeed—leads the wise man to do nothing—and only the fool can act. The fool acts under illusion. And when that illusion is colored with the ideal he who acts becomes God's fool. There is something in man that raises him above the criterion of history and the meek come to inherit the earth.

This finding the cause in things beyond the immediate control of man reminds one of Dietrich's analysis of social interaction. It indicates the deprecatory attitude both men take toward individual action in difficulty. The difference is that Dietrich finds the answer in united social endeavor and Niebuhr in spiritual resources rooted in cosmic faith:

Whatever new technique for social and economic life may finally be developed, the problem of living together can not finally be solved if we can not develop in men the art of trusting each other in spite of their weaknesses and forgiving each other's sins. Without such a spiritual quality in human relations, which can be maintained only upon the basis of religious affirmations about the universe itself, we must resign ourselves to the dubious fate of a civilization which substitutes class conflicts for international warfare and persuades us to hate our neighbors instead of strangers.¹

The religion needed for our times,—realistic, open-eyed, acute,—possessing, as he says "the sophistication required

¹Niebuhr, Survey, 58:486.

to detect sin, covert in the intricacies of social and economic life," may easily kill the simple qualities involved in trust and faith—the qualities which keep human life wholesome.¹

Niebuhr gives away his intimate, deep-seated, but rarely articulated ideal when, in discussion of Europe's religious pessimism,² he talks about a bright young chap who intrigued him with his combination of Catholicism, intellectualism, and socialism. "Our own culture," says Niebuhr, "is not yet deep enough to effect such combination." He voices the same desire in another connection. "We need," he says, "the scientific approach to all life's problems, and a religious perception of the total meaning of things, and a commitment to what is best in life and best in the world itself."³ This quotation may indicate that Niebuhr is hedging on specific issues, but he certainly does not do so in the most important issue of the day, the struggle for economic and political reform. Indeed he believes that the chief stumbling block to religious faith today is the failure of religion to make civilization ethical.⁴

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Fosdick holds, as do Tittle, Holmes, and Niebuhr, that religious institutions will stand or fall as they succeed or

¹Niebuhr, Survey, 58:446.

²Niebuhr, Christian Century, 47:1032.

³Niebuhr, National Conference Social Work, 55:57.

⁴Niebuhr, Does Civilization Need Religion? New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927, p. 12.

fail in the attempt to build a righteous world. "Christianity....will be judged and judged rightly not alone by what it does for individuals, but by what it makes of the world in which individuals must live."¹ He is ready and able, of course, to point out that the church is not the great failure of our time—not by a good deal; and he flays the legal, economic, and political systems:

Our legal system, supposed to prevent and punish crime, has failed, calamitously failed, so that years ago, yes, before prohibition came in, President Taft said that the administration of criminal law in this country was a disgrace to our civilization. And our economic process, leaning back too exclusively on the idea that the private profit motive is enough for the economic system, has failed, until we face the stark insanity that we starve because we have too much wheat and go unclad because we have too much cotton and have too little to consume because we have produced too much. And our public conscience has failed until in this city (New York), to our infinite disgrace, we, the children of our fathers, patiently let ourselves be door mats for a pack of mercenary politicians to wipe their muddy boots upon.²

In these days of economic calamity he spends much time discussing the problem from the Christian point of view. He says he cannot appreciate the spiritual beauties of poverty. Poverty is spiritual disaster—a curse.³

But his church and his pulpit are not pledged to the program of any political party. "I abhor," he says, "partisan politics in the pulpit."⁴ Neither is there a pledge to

¹Fosdick, Challenge of the Present Crisis, p. 19.

²Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 6:369.

³Fosdick, "The Tragedy of Misused Power," The Church Monthly, 2 (August, 1928) 227.

⁴Fosdick, "Dr. Fosdick on the Prohibition Question," The Church Monthly, 2 (October, 1928) 263.

any economic creed. He quotes George V of England, answering an insinuation of partisanship, "I would have you understand that no political party has me in its pocket," and continues:

That is finely said. The king of England has no business to be in any party's pocket. No more has any Christian minister. Neither communism nor socialism nor capitalism should have a minister in its pocket. That is not our function. But our function is to say over and over again that business is sacred, that economic life is always basically a matter of human relationships, that whatever happens there has endless repercussions in human life, that every public-spirited and cooperative policy established in business registers itself in more decent opportunities for human beings, and that every selfish and sordid policy registers itself in broken homes and blasted childhood.¹

He is no socialist in the strict sense, holding that the present structure of business can be satisfactorily doctored:

Economic life has no business to be sordid and pagan. It has no business to be merely a competitive scramble for private wealth....What changes in the social structure would be necessary to express this truth factually I am not sure. Some say that only socialism will do it. Others, like Mr. Swope, would say that socialism would merely transfer the responsibility from individuals to a government composed of precisely the same individuals and that such a way of solving problems would probably make a bad matter worse and that we had better start with the social order we have and improve upon it. Personally, I should incline to the latter opinion.²

In a very interesting sermon showing how minorities have always determined advance, and predicting the same procedure for the future, Fosdick divides men in "the game of life" into three classes, those who are anti-social, those

¹Fosdick, The Church Monthly, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp.266-67.
²Fosdick, Ibid., p. 266.

who are average, who play according to the rules, and last those above the average who question the rules. He describes the first group in a great sermon on the tragedy of misused power:

Look at our country today. What is our peril?.... there are men not feeble-minded, men of ability—they might even hold seats in a President's cabinet, they might even rise to the top in American industry....men like that in these last few years, dishonoring the courts, despising the people, contemning the government, have presented to the world one of the most devastating spectacles of wrongdoing in our history.¹

The second group he treats with great consideration, but pleads with them to join the small third group:

Often in these trying days I think of business men. They face heavy burdens, practically complicated and ethically difficult. The more I know of them the better I appreciate the fine code of honor with which they handle their responsibilities. Yet, after all, the final test of a social attitude is at this point to which our thought has brought us. Not for all the world would they run their business in lawless disregard of the rules. They have a careful sense of honor about observing them. But are they dedicating their brains—and the best brains of America are in the business world—to this third matter: cannot the rules be improved? Cannot the whole game be made more just?²

We have in this immense problem of social maladjustment, Fosdick repeats, the real test of religion. The theological quarrels go only a little way down. Christ wrestles with Anti-christ in the struggle for control of the power of a machine civilization.

¹Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 2:226.

²Fosdick, "The Hope of the World in Its Minorities," The Church Monthly, 5 (June, 1931) 8.

For I take it that the central principle of Christianity is the dedication of power to service. It is about the most revolutionary idea that ever came into human life....All ability,¹ obligation; all power, opportunity for service.

People have said that the old religion does not fit the new world. Of course, says Fosdick. It was never intended to fit it. "The old religion should be ashamed to fit the new world. It never has been and it is not now the business of Christianity to fit the new world, but to challenge it."² This bold assertion carries serious implications for the ministers of religion. The least they can do, he says explicitly, is to dissociate themselves from this institutional bond between the church and the world, and try to build the new church which will house the spiritual life of the future.³

John Haynes Holmes

Holmes is an optimist where human nature is concerned.

He says:

....our feeling that in every man and woman the whole world round there is the possibility of the development of the moral and spiritual life....it may eventually turn out that humanity as a whole is utterly incapable of ever conquering the brute and learning to control the savage that dwells in human nature. But we dare to pin our faith to the possibility, and in that faith we give our efforts to the realization of our hope that one day the possibility may be realized.⁴

¹Fosdick, The Church Monthly, 2:227.

²Ibid., Vol. 5, No. 12.

³Ibid., 5:8.

⁴Holmes, The Community Pulpit, 13:16. Series 1924-25.

Yet he is a bit realistic for all that. "Human" may mean "weak" too. He says in one place, "For we are all of us human and need therefore the lash which the wage lays upon our backs."¹

The great bulk of his sermons deal with social problems. For he sees humanity despoiled and crying for help and our strength in such a situation cannot be called our own:

.....Like the traveller to Jericho, humanity in our age, as in every age, has fallen 'among thieves,' and lies now in the gutter, 'half-dead.' It is prudent, I have no doubt, to pass by 'on the other side.' But it is not right, and never can be right. What strength we have is not our own. It belongs not to ourselves but to mankind. Iche diene—I serve! Selfishness here is the unpardonable sin.²

This is his battle cry and his defense.

It is also his justification for the existence of the church. For he finds room for the church in the new day, albeit it will be a different church—a community church. Theology will pass from the body of the church to the mind of the individual. Denominationalism will pass altogether. And with the idea of denominationalism will pass the idea of the church as a private corporation with private interests to that of a public institution with public interests, centering first in its community and widening to include the whole race of men.³

For the metropolitan areas Holmes foresees even fewer churches with but two functions, the one prophetic, "preaching

¹Holmes, The Community Pulpit, 10:9. Series 1925-26.

²Holmes, ibid., 7:18. Series 1931-32.

³Holmes, ibid., Series 1930-31, No. 1, passim; 1924-25, 16:23.

righteousness to the great congregations"; and the other that of "service stations" for uplift and reconciliation.¹ He echoes Fosdick's ideal of a non-partisan pulpit:

The minister (meaning himself)....preaching a message which should have a universal appeal to open minds and aspiring hearts, and in refusing to identify his interests and sympathies with any single group of men.²

Perhaps the primary interest of Holmes is world peace. His sermon, "The Unknown Soldier Speaks," has produced an extraordinary effect upon the listener. In giving the record of his twenty-five years in New York City he describes the jolt given his thinking by the World War. He says,

I studied war as a phenomenon of social evolution, especially in its relation to ethics and religion. I came out of that study, as you well know, a pacifist of the extreme non-resistant type.³

The weapon he urges against war is non-resistance and the source of his inspiration here is Gandhi whom he practically worships. In his sermon on the "Dilemma of the Moral Life," he advocates hero-worship frankly as an excellent way to find the right in a world of relative values.

He preaches a unique sermon on "War Literature Today," analyzing the phenomenal change in sentiment vs. war by the literature of the three periods after 1914.⁴

Another of his major interests is socialism. He holds

¹Holmes, "My Twenty-five Years in New York," The Community Pulpit, Series 1931-32, No. 13, p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴Series 1930-31, No. 4.

that a Christian cannot live as a Christian in a society which is itself un-Christian.¹ In 1912 he announced his conversion to the philosophy of socialism.² In his sermon, "If I Were Unemployed," he urges the man out of work to reflect seriously upon the basic organization of the economic society which periodically casts off a considerable number of its members without feeling and without after-thought. Providence, he said in another sermon,³ has little to do with the present economic crisis. Holmes is an officer of the League for Industrial Democracy.

Illustrating his conception of the function of the church and incidentally mentioning another of his crusades is the following paragraph from his sermon on capital punishment:

....We must get rid of capital punishment.... It remains now not to argue but to act. In this city at 104 Fifth Avenue, is the office of the League for the Abolition of Capital Punishment. Join it! In Albany, on the table of the legislature, is a bill for the abolition of capital punishment in New York State. Support it!⁴

Holmes fills the role of reform preacher in the field of municipal politics—he preached on "The Shame of Mayor Walker's New York"—urging his hearers to drive the rascals

¹Holmes, The Community Pulpit, 7:7. Series 1930-31.

²Ibid., 13:20. Series 1931-32.

³Holmes, "The Good in Bad Times," The Community Pulpit, Series 1931-32, No. 6, pp. 3-4.

⁴Holmes, "Shall Capital Punishment Be Abolished?" The Community Pulpit, Series 1927-28, No. 14, p. 21.

out and organize for permanent reform.¹ With Rabbi Wise he publicly appealed to the Governor of the State for the removal of an undesirable state official in the metropolis.

Some of his other causes (defined by him as social interests more precious than life itself) are prohibition--of which Holmes is a staunch supporter--equality for women, abolition of child labor, birth control, civil liberty, justice for the negro, and advancement of labor.² He is an ardent advocate of Zionism as evidenced in his book entitled Palestine to-day and to-morrow; a Gentile's survey of Zionism.³

¹Holmes, The Community Pulpit, Series 1930-31, No. 2.

²Holmes, ibid., 10:20.

³New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The Preachers in Review

Fosdick's outstanding quality is his finesse as a preacher. He is by far the easiest to read and, I think, the outstanding man in the pulpit. The quotation already given, "Man is a sinner....His sins clothe the world in lamentation" is a good example of his homiletical art. Another is the closing paragraph of his "Tragedy of Misused Power": "Ah Pilate! we have no right to condescend to you. We too stand this Holy Week in the Praetorium: We have power to release Christ or to crucify."

I think his great weakness is his lack of a refined intellectual conscience. With his great concern for values and his pragmatic bias, he applies his ingenuity and eloquence to modernize the ancient goods, and since he knows the weakness of mankind for drama and the supreme role of the emotions in human activity, he translates and transposes, imports and exports facts with an obsession for the needs of the confronting situation and a too great neglect of the integrity of the structure he has built. The effect at first is stunning but it does not last. Like the great new church edifice in which he now preaches, his sermons are embellished with antique contrivances which please at first sight with the sanctity of history and memory. But the modern mind

penetrates to the riveted and welded and reinforced substructure and finds the external mantle merely external—functionless. Mr. Fosdick has yet to realize that integrity of method is prerequisite to permanence of effect.

Tittle's theological thinking is not creative. He gets it mostly from the modernist school and modifies it slightly by a greater emphasis on the example of Jesus and the idea of a struggling God. It is interesting to note the unavowed paradox of an ideal being who personifies "eternal truth and right" and who at the same time exerts himself so desperately in the effort to elevate and beautify human society.

Tittle's theological difficulties do not seem, however, to complicate his social thinking which is aggressive, explicit and, it seems, effective. He is a bold preacher on social themes.

Niebuhr might accurately be called a vigorously articulated bifurcation. These three words describe the qualities of this man's preaching. It is vigorous, it is acutely articulated, and it is flagrantly dualistic. If it is necessary to illustrate this point after what has been written one might quote two sentences of Niebuhr's: "Society is at once the enemy and the support of every man." "Thought and life depend upon each other and frustrate each other."¹

Niebuhr's condition of internal torment—his word is "agony"—seems to follow naturally enough from his temperament

¹Atlantic Monthly, 143:792.

and his experience: a religious absolutist, immersed in vast social maladjustment, who can neither modify his rigid metaphysic nor ignore the chaos of life about him. The consequence in ideology is what we find pervading Niebuhr's thinking—paradox, resolved by a touch of madness, which transmutes philosophy into the wisdom of religion and of God.

If William James had met him he would have called Niebuhr a sick soul. And Niebuhr would no doubt have replied that man's sickness was God's health. For here, as in Fosdick, we see the negation of the intellectual conscience only with Niebuhr the demand for certainty is more personal and pressing—his religion saves him from despair—and no price is too great, not even the sacrifice of intellectual probity, for the hope of ultimate success in the search for the ideal.

Niebuhr, with his scorn for the "degeneration of common sense," finds his opposite in Dietrich with his entire commitment to the scientific method, to understanding and to the complete efficacy of knowledge in the solution of problems and the glorification of life. There is a strange similarity between Niebuhr's conception of man's helplessness and Dietrich's conviction of the overwhelming influence of environment, but these positions seem to issue in diametrically opposed notions of the role of man in the task of saving himself. Niebuhr finally avoids despair in the maintenance of personal integrity and religious faith. Dietrich merely asserts man's capacity to remake society by a more intelligent adaptation to "conditions."

He, like Tittle, gets involved in a paradox which he either does not recognize or refuses to avow. Dietrich's dilemma is the conferring on man, the creature of circumstances, the foresight and power to create the superman.

His optimism is more than merely illogical. It flies in the face of the facts. He proposes to assume in his Church that everything is "on the basis of one humanity with a common purpose, a common interest, and a common destiny." This is an ideal (and a questionable one at that) but to act as though it were true in a society like our own means blinding oneself to crucial social questions. Niebuhr's pessimism, in contrast, is rather a relief than otherwise.

Holmes too is an optimist where human nature is concerned, but his preaching and his activities deal so largely with concrete situations and specific problems that he cannot bring himself to Dietrich's seeming imperturbability. Holmes is intellectually confused but militantly active in the field of social reform.

He is "thoroughly, frankly agnostic" and "completely confused," but he is also "possessed of deep conviction" and "know(s) the direction." He adds, "authority comes only from the experience of a soul that has drunk deeply at the springs of life."¹ As we have seen, Holmes really believes in ultimate Right and Truth. Obviously such a one is neither thoroughly nor frankly agnostic. He is a confused believer. In

¹Conversation, The Meadville Theological School, November 3, 1930.

the matter of the moral law, what we have said of Dietrich applies equally here. Permanence in a growing universe is a contradiction in terms.

But Holmes' distinction is not his confusion. It is his ministry of agitation. He is on fire for the underdog. He is contemporary and close to the people. His social philosophy is militantly socialistic and puritanical—on the question of prohibition running counter to the current liberal point of view, in other respects, particularly his sympathy with Zionism, specifically affected by his environment. In general it may be said to reflect liberal opinion in New York City, the center of American liberalism.

Parallels and Contrasts

What significant similarities and contrasts has this analysis of five American preachers disclosed? The contrasts are found largely in the areas of speculation: the reality and nature of God and the technique for gaining help from him for human life and its problems. Niebuhr holds to a transcendent God though like all the rest he incorporates the idea of the immanence of the ideal in social life. Fosdick and Tittle either for purposes of expediency or conviction (no doubt both) hold to an immanent God revealed in Jesus Christ. Holmes makes God stand for "the righteous life of all the world" and believes further that ultimately there are ideal Truth and Right. Dietrich deifies the moral law without clearly defining it.

Holmes and Dietrich hold worship to be aspiration.

The other three include communion and adoration of deity and Niebuhr insists on a more or less orthodox expiatory function as part of the process. It is interesting to note the use of the words "technique" and "pedagogy" and "assurance" by the men who cling most to traditional religious concepts.

The similarities arrive when the men begin to deal with the practical affairs of social interaction. The one striking unanimity is the conviction everywhere expressed of the corporate character of modern life and the demand for recognition of this fact in the attempt either to Christianize or socialize persons. The mildest preachers on this point, Fosdick and Tittle, urge a simultaneous endeavor to build character and rebuild society. Niebuhr, Holmes, and Dietrich seem to hold that the rebuilding of society is prerequisite to personal salvation, though Niebuhr is pessimistic of the possibility of success in any immediate future. But all recognize its importance and the sermons on war and peace, on crime, on industry, on youth, on the church, even on marriage and the family, reflect this concern for the extra-individual forces of the environing physical and social world. The percentage of material in the sermons dealing with social philosophy amounts roughly to forty per cent, just about as much as the material on theology.

Another and related similarity which has been suggested above is the notion of the incorporated ideal—what Fosdick

calls the "God in experience," what Niebuhr calls "immanence," what Holmes means when he talks about the heart of man being "the source of all sanctities," and what Dietrich repeatedly interprets as humanism.

The passing of denominationalism is implicit in all the sermons. Tittle and Niebuhr, who are closest perhaps to institutional ties, both grandly ignore the narrowing barriers and look to a bond of union constructed of cosmic faith and human cooperation. Fosdick has dropped the denominational insignia from his new church. Dietrich maintains it but is rebellious of all institutional restraint. And Holmes makes the future of the church depend upon its becoming a community rather than a denominational enterprise.

Finally, there is the elusive but pervasive tendency to make the needs of men central to the spirit and purpose of religion. Even Niebuhr is religious because it saves him from despair. This is the most encouraging fact attested to by this paper and promises much for the future of religion.

Looking Forward

It may be said, finally, that it is not, in the main, any lack of boldness in the preachers, but rather a lack of intellectual clarity and philosophical consistency that constitutes their significant weakness.

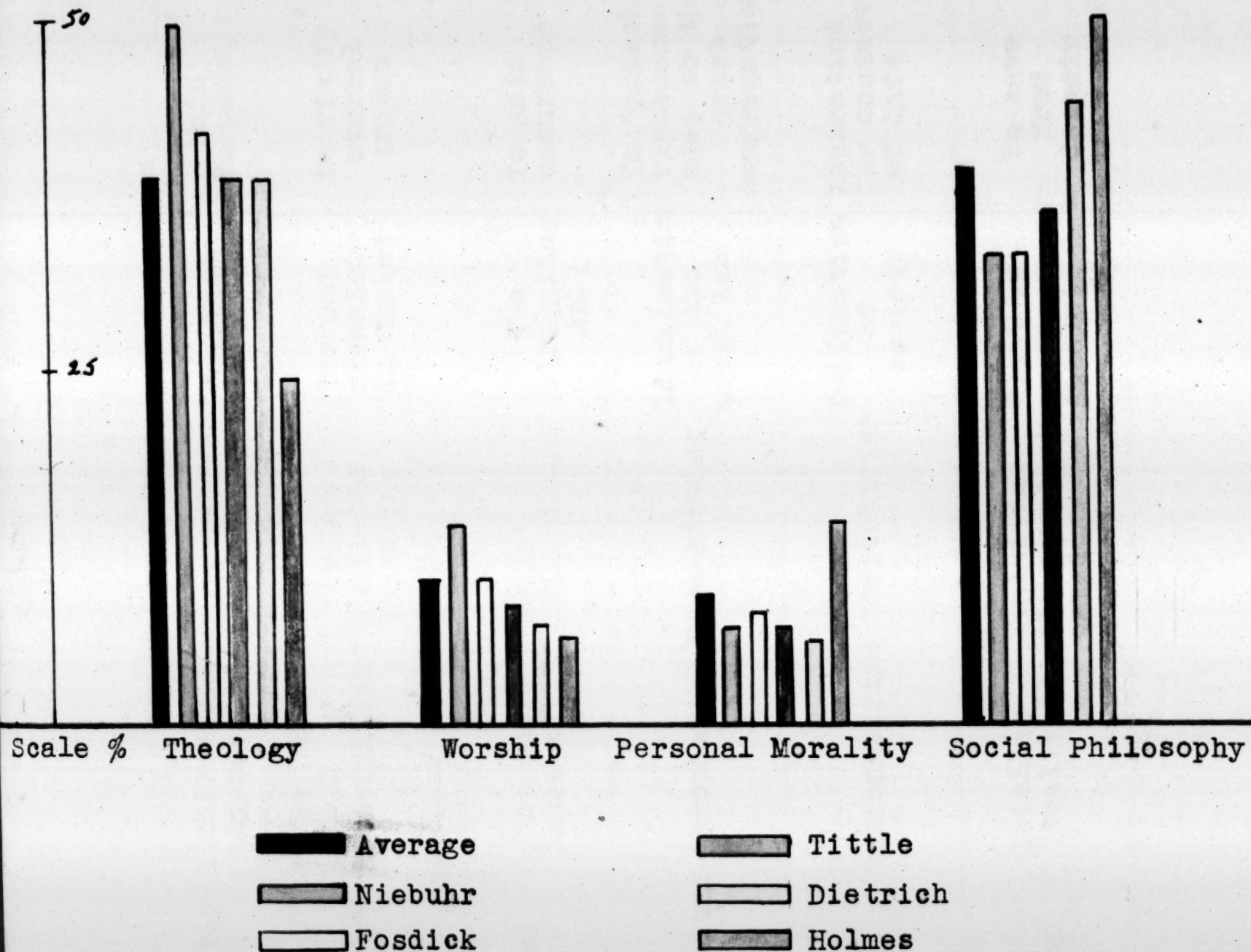
One might say that the great need is a progressive clarification of philosophical and sociological premises for the purpose of freeing the mind in its effort to increase the

area of unanimity of opinion on social issues. Would not this help greatly to realize the latent powers of organized religion in the task of building the great society?

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Relative Quantity of Material in the Four Divisions



This chart is not intended to reflect the amount of material which the preachers give to these subjects in all their sermons. It measures only the percentage in each division of the total number of notes of each preacher taken for this paper to illustrate his position. Thus of all of Niebuhr's notes, 51% were on theology, 7% were on worship, 7% were on personal morality, and 43% were on social philosophy. Holmes' data comes from an analysis of all his sermon subjects from 1924 to 1931, inclusive.

The incidental character of the comparison makes the following two facts especially interesting:

- (1) The quantity of material in social philosophy increases as quantity of material in theology declines.
- (2) The variation of the quantity of material in theology and worship is, roughly, parallel.

An Attempt at Classification

Preacher	Geographical type	Intellectual Approach	Method	Theology	Main Purpose
Fosdick	National	Rationalizing	Perfect homiletic technique	The God revealed in Christ	To vivify eternal truths
Tittle	Suburban	"What would Jesus say?"	Undistinguished	The struggling God	To gain assurance
Holmes	Metropolitan	"Prophetic"	Hard-hitting	Idealization of the moral law	To "preach righteousness to the great congregation"
Dietrich	Western	Rationalistic	"Scientific"	Deification of society	Aspiration for conduct of life
Niebuhr	European	Intellectualistic	Exploiting the great paradoxes	Quest of the Absolute	To save from despair

The Material at a Glance

Preacher	Theology	Prayer	Personal Morality	Marriage	World Peace	Industry	The Church
Fosdick	Christ-centered Rationalizes new knowledge	Communion Worship Appreciation	Problem of conserving personality	Assumes no substitute	Pacifist	Reform of Capitalism	Denominationalism is dead
Tittle	Same as Fosdick	Man aspiring God struggling	Heeding past and great souls of present	Look to history	Anti- legion Anti- Tribune Pacifist	Modified Socialism	Creed must not be basis of organization
Holmes	Monistic Evolutionary God = person-Confession ification of Consecration the moral law	Meditation Confession Consecration the moral law	Embrace a cause Emulate a hero Seek consensus	Requires for solution the best thought we have	Strong Pacifist	Socialist	Basis to be community and public service
Dietrich	Rationalistic	Aspiration	Opposes anarchy Seeks adjustment to "conditions"	Divorce is complement but marriage best solution for problem of sex	Pacifist	For socialization	Common basis for task of elevating man
Niebuhr	Paradox: Real and ideal in conflict; Ideal is basis of real	Repentance Petition	Maintenance of personal integrity	Love, permanence, complete surrender	Pacifist	Socialist	Needs faith and action

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Luther Burbank	Freedom in the Schools
What Is a Liberal?	Did Jesus Really Live?
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Ten Years in a Free Pulpit	
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Is Atheism a Menace?	In Defense of Marriage
The Advance of Humanism	Religion Without Revelation
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Do We Need a New Morality?	

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The Chief Danger in Our Civilization	What Happens to a College Student's Religion?
Meeting Trouble Without God	Why Marriages Fail
Shall Women Be Free?	What is Happiness?
My Religion	The Myth of a Superior Race
Robert G. Ingersoll—An Appreciation	The Superstition of Sin

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